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SUBJECT: Joint Weeka No. 18 for State, Army and Air Departments from S - Section I

DECLASSIFIED DATE: PER EMBASSY OFFICE ARA FADRC FOI CASE NO. 140332

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The Government's conduct of the preliminary hearings of those accused of complicity in the Salamá revolt of March 29 pointed to an intention to stress alleged foreign intervention as a means of unifying nationalistic sentiment behind the Administration and discrediting the domestic anti-Communist opposition. Confessions subsequently repudiated by the accused as having been extorted by torture implicated the United Fruit Company as the financial backer of the plot and said that the Ambassadors of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua had aided the movement by bringing in arms through their diplomatic status. Meanwhile, Sr. Juan CORDOVA Cerna, who was accused by the authorities of being the architect of the Salama plot, appeared in Honduras and told a tale of illegal detention, shocking mistreatment and of then being set free at the Honduran border.

Despite the underlying tensions here resulting from the Salamá affair and Guatemala's recent withdrawal from the Organization of Central American States (ODECA), the visit to Guatemala of Assistant Secretary of State John M. CABOT was marred by no untoward incident and his talks with President Arbenz and Foreign Minister Osegueda, while marked by definite differences of opinion, provided an opportunity for a frank exchange of views.

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS

Despite earlier charges in the press that prisoners held for investigation in connection with the unsuccessful uprising at Salamá on March 29 had been tortured to extract confessions (Weeka No. 16), the Guatemalan authorities on terminating the preliminary judicial proceedings released to the press this week over 1000 pages of testimony purporting to show that the revolt had received $64,000 from the United Fruit Company and that El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic were to have sent military aid. In the statement allegedly made by the anti-Communist student Mario SANDOVAL Alarcón, Col. Alberto FUNES, Salvadoran Ambassador in Guatemala, had delivered 30 machine guns to Carlos SIMMONS, the anti-Communist leader now in exile in Honduras. SANDOVAL another student, Oscar COBAR, allegedly confessed that Col. Funes had

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offered 60 machine guns and that the weapons had been brought to Guatemala by the Ambassadors of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras, taking advantage of their diplomatic privileges. Cóbar also reportedly stated that he had "heard" a conversation between Simons and others in which Simons said the United Fruit Company had contributed $64,000. Several of the declarations claimed that Sr. Juan CORDOVA Cerna was the principal leader of the movement and that he would have been the provisional President had the uprising succeeded.

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All these "confessions" were reportedly repudiated when the accused appeared before the judge in Salamá on the ground that they had been extorted by the use of torture. The Salvadoran Ambassador here as well as Sr. Roberto CANESSA, Foreign Minister of El Salvador, emphatically denied to the press any part in the plot.

The "confessions" have none-the-less provided the pro-Government press with material for justifying Guatemala's appeal to the United Nations against the threat of foreign intervention and its withdrawal from ODECA. The Government propagandists have also asserted that the anti-Communists are in "shameful alliance" with foreign interventionists and have used the fact that Sr. Córdova Cerna and Sr. Carlos Simons were at different times in the employ of the United Fruit Company as evidence that the Company is actively conspiring against the Arbenz regime.

A report given to the independent newspaper El Imparcial by Sr. Córdova Cerna after his arrival in Honduras charges that the Guatemalan police ignored a habeas corpus order from a court; that they lied to the public by stating that he had escaped on April 3 when he was actually still in Guatemala City; and that they used brutal means to extort a confession in violation of Article 45 of the Constitution; that he had been held under water until nearly drowned, had had the soles of his feet beaten, and had been kept bound, stripped and blindfolded in a filthy cell without food or water for five days; but that he had refused to confess anything. The account likewise stated that on April 18 (15 days after the police said he had escaped) he was placed blindfolded in a car between two guards with a third sitting on his feet, that he had been set free several hours later on a foot path and had been told this would lead him to Honduras.

The charges of torturing prisoners have been ignored or lightly brushed aside by the pro-Government press, and Congress on April 16 summarily rejected motions by two opposition and two Administration deputies for an investigation of the charges.

Col. Rogelio CRUZ Wer, Chief of Police, promptly denied the truth of Sr. Córdova Cerna's statement and Sr. Augusto CHARNAUD MacDonald, Minister of Interior asserted that Sr. Córdova Cerna should produce evidence in support of his charges.

PSCHOLIOGICAL

There are indications that the Guatemalan Government is stepping up its propaganda program to counter press commentaries abroad, especially in the United States, depicting Guatemala as an outpost of Soviet Communism in the Western Hemisphere. Under its new director, Sr. Carlos GONZALEZ Orellana, the propaganda office of the Presidency started a few months ago to issue a

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bimonthly Bulletin explaining the Government's views on current issues and on April 15 it began publication of a fortnightly English language version of the Bulletin called Guatemala. This leaflet is placed by immigration officers in the passports of English-speaking persons as they arrive in Guatemala.

Another indication of a possible change in emphasis was the removal of Sr. Leopoldo CASTILLO Sáenz as Director of the official newspaper Diario de Centro América following reported protests by the Honduran Ambassador against an article by the Communist writer Melvin René BARAHONA which appeared on April 23 and referred to President Gálvez of Honduras as a "criminal".

The new Director, Sr. Ramiro PONCE Monroy, a school teacher who has been a reporter on the Diario de Centro América for three years, announced that he would keep his readers informed regarding the activities of the Government and would not discuss the internal affairs of friendly countries or permit the publication of insults or injurious comment not in harmony with the paper's role as the spokesman of the Government. The independent Prensa Libre approved this policy and suggested that it also be applied to the official radio station TGW and the daily Nuestro Diario, which, it said, is supported by Government funds.

R E Schoenfeld

Rudolf E. Schoenfeld

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